Letter to the Public

On May 31, 2002, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) released on its website the results of its National Air Toxics Assessment (NATA). In this study, EPA modeled the public's exposure to 32 toxic air pollutants and estimated the inhalation health risks posed by the pollutants for every county in the United States. I have enclosed for your information a short summary of the NATA findings for our region of the country.

In New England, NATA estimates that the inhalation risks from these toxic pollutants may cause 1,900 additional cancer cases annually, which represents 3% of new cancer cases. It is estimated that other health effects, such as asthma and birth defects, may result from exposure to these toxic air pollutants. As described in the enclosed summary, most of the health risk in New England is driven by exposure to a dozen or so pollutants. In coordination with NESCAUM and representatives from the states' air programs, my office identified twelve chemicals which are found in concentrations above the health benchmark in at least one New England state. Although EPA has not set a health benchmark for diesel particulate, we also consider diesel particulate to be of special concern because the exposure concentration is the highest of all the chemicals modeled for New England. The majority of these 13 toxic air pollutants are emitted from mobile sources such as cars, buses, trucks, construction equipment, lawnmowers, and power boats and from area sources such as chromium electroplaters, drycleaners, residential wood stoves and open burning.

The health risks posed by these pollutants are too high and underscore the need to strengthen our efforts to reduce air toxic emissions. We can reduce emissions of toxic air pollution through a variety of voluntary and regulatory strategies, including:

- strengthening implementation and enforcement of emission standards for air toxic pollutants from stationary sources;
- encouraging the retrofitting of control equipment on diesel vehicles, the use of low sulfur diesel fuel, and the adoption of anti-idling strategies;
- promoting the use of alternative-fueled (and hybrid) vehicles;
- educating the public on steps that can be taken to improve indoor air quality, such as reducing their exposure to environmental tobacco smoke;
- promoting improved energy efficiency and the use of clean, renewable power; and
- expanding air toxics monitoring and improving emission inventories, which will allow us to better target and prioritize our emission reduction efforts.

EPA New England is already working with many of your staff on these activities. I appreciate your agency's continued commitment to these important efforts.

If you have any questions about NATA or EPA's air toxics program, please contact me or have your staff contact our air toxics coordinator Susan Lancey at (617) 918-1656. I look forward to working together further on reducing emissions of toxic air pollutants and improving the air quality for all New Englanders.

Sincerely,

Robert W. Varney
Regional Administrator